



File Code: 1950

Date: June 11, 2010

RE: Lonesome Wood Vegetation Management 2 Project – Comment Period

The Gallatin National Forest is preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) to consider potential effects of the Lonesome Wood Vegetation Management 2 project. As proposed, the Project would treat about 2900 acres in the wild land urban interface (WUI) along the west Shore of Hebgen Lake, near West Yellowstone Montana. A project summary and map are attached.

We would like to hear from you and to address any concerns you may have about the Project. **You are invited to an open house on Thursday June 24 at the Hebgen Lake Ranger District between 3-7 pm. If you wish to submit comments concerning the scope of the analysis, your comments should be submitted by July 12, 2010.** If you submitted comments during the comment period for the Environmental Assessment completed in 2007/2008 you do not need to resubmit those comments.

The Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS was published in the federal register on **June 9, 2010**. The NOI initiated the scoping period for the EIS. The NOI is available for review on the Gallatin Forest webpage or you can contact the District office at (406)823-6961 for a copy. The webpage address is: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin/?page=projects>

Send written comments to Teri Seth, Forest Service Project Manager, Gallatin National Forest, 3710 Fallon Street Suite C, Bozeman, MT 59718. Comments may also be sent in microsoft word format via email to comments-northern-gallatin@fs.fed.us or via facsimile to 406-522-2528. The NOI contains additional instructions for submitting comments.

You may be wondering if this is a “new” project. This project is the same project that you commented on during the 2006-2008 timeframe. The Lonesome Wood Vegetation Management Decision Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact (DN / FONSI) and environmental assessment (EA) were reviewed in response to Ruling CV 07-134-M-DWM from the Montana District Court. The ruling effectively returned the grizzly bear in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem to the threatened species list under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Forest determined that this changed condition now requires a new decision because the April 2008 decision was consistent with the grizzly bear status at that time and not the relisted grizzly bear status. Consequently, the DN / FONSI (2008) was withdrawn on November 5, 2009.

This new analysis will incorporate mitigation and analysis to comply with current direction related to the grizzly bear; and will incorporate new information for other resources since 1.5 years have lapsed. Otherwise the proposal is the same project analyzed in 2007. Most likely you are aware that several issues were resolved throughout the analysis and decision process in 2008. At this time, the previously selected alternative (Alternative 3) is still the



preferred alternative but the project design includes a reduction in temporary road.

We encourage you to participate in the open house and to submit comments. While there is broad support for this project, there is also some opposition. I encourage you to express your concerns as well as your support for this project. For more information about the project, contact Teri Seth, West Zone NEPA Team Leader at the Bozeman District office (406)522-2520.

Sincerely,

/s/ Elizabeth MCFarland (for)

MARY C. ERICKSON

Forest Supervisor

LONESOME WOOD VEGETATION MANAGEMENT 2 PROJECT SUMMARY

Location: The Hebgen Lake Ranger District of the Gallatin National Forest, Gallatin County, Montana. The project area is located about 10 air miles west of West Yellowstone, MT along the west shore of Hebgen Lake and Hebgen Lake Road (FSR #167) on national forest system lands.

This forest vegetation management project integrates multiple resource goals and is designed to increase firefighter and public safety and to reduce wild land fire risks to private and NFS improvements in the WUI. Aspen forest enhancement is also planned. The goals would be achieved through removal of crown, ladder and surface fuels and conifer encroachment using mechanical thin, hand thin and prescribed burning.

The proposal includes a combination of treatments on approximately 2,900 acres along the Hebgen Lake Road (FSR 167). Proposed treatments include approximately 2525 acres of forest thinning and 325 acres of slashing followed by prescribed burning. Primary and secondary activities may include, but are not limited to thinning through logging, slashing small trees, whole tree yarding, yarding unmerchantable material, hand and machine piling, pile and broadcast burning, hauling of commercial material, firewood removal, biomass reduction such as chipping, erosion control, construction of and rehabilitation of skid trails, landings and approximately 6-6.5 miles of temporary roads.

Under existing vegetation conditions, large crown fires with high fire intensity, dangerous flame lengths, rapid rates of fire spread and long spotting distances for firebrands are expected. There has been an increased emphasis on creating defensible areas to put wildland firefighters into for structure protection. The proposed treatments would help to provide defensible areas where firefighters can suppress a wildland fire with fewer hazards. The proposed treatments along the evacuation route are important to ensure access for emergency personal and equipment response. Evacuation route treatments are equally important for possible evacuation of private homeowners, landowners and forest users. In this project area, aspen stands are being encroached by conifers of various age classes. Conifer removal and/or prescribed burning are intended to reinvigorate aspen clones. Aspen forest provides species diversity, can benefit wildlife and slow the progression of fires.

Major issues raised by the public include concern for public safety, impacts to wildlife (grizzly bear, moose and goshawk), scenery and whether the proposed treatments would effectively reduce wildland fuel hazard. Design features common to the action alternatives mitigate the potential impact for these and virtually all other issues.

Alternative 1 – The No Action Alternative, in which the project area would have no fuels reduction or aspen enhancement at this time, and the area would be subject to natural or ongoing changes only.

Alternative 2 - The Proposed Action is designed to reduce the wildland fire risk to life and property in the wildland urban interface and evacuation routes for this WUI while complying with new direction related to the current direction for grizzly bear habitat. Also, the alternative is designed to enhance aspen regeneration.

Alternative 3 – Moose Mitigation Alternative, in addition to the goals in Alternative 2, the goal would be to reduce impacts to moose winter habitat by reducing acres impacted.

